Letter from Somalia
An S-3's Observations

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MARTIN N. STANTON

During the initial stages of Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, conducted numerous operations in the Shebelle Valley region from Belet Weynen to Kismayu. The battalion task force was also given the responsibility for Humanitarian Relief Sector (HRS) Marka, an area about twice the size of the state of Connecticut.

The following observations were originally written in personal letters to friends who might find themselves conducting similar operations. In these letters, I shared lessons I had learned as S-3 during the battalion's tour from December 1992 to April 1993:

The Basics. The lessons at battalion level, for the most part, reaffirm the importance of the basics: squad and platoon battle drills, patrolling, reaction to ambush, and security, security, security!

Intelligence. One of the most challenging things for the battalion staff was building an intelligence picture of the relief sector. Since little or no useful information was coming from higher intelligence sources, we had to build our own intelligence base. Fortunately, we had an excellent S-2 who worked well with the local community and was able to learn quite a bit about what was going on. Collection, however, is everyone's business. The lesson here is not to let anything happen without a thorough debrief. That was a point we had to make. Things that seemed innocent often were *not* when taken in the larger context of the overall picture.

Night Fighting. Night sights really did give us a priceless advantage over the bandits. Night patrolling and operations must be emphasized.

Rules of Engagement (ROEs). Drill ROEs constantly with your leaders, and set up situational training exercises that are based on the ROEs. The *shoot/not shoot* scenarios will present themselves time and again. Because we trained our soldiers well, we didn't have a problem with this, but if we had not emphasized it, we easily could have.

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NCOs in the TOC. Your NCOs have to be capable of running the tactical operations center (TOC). The decentralized nature of the operations we conducted meant that the battalion commander would be out with one element and I would be in a place from which I could communicate with everyone and coordinate. The TOC—using retransmission equipment—could be as far away as 40 kilometers. This humanitarian, low-intensity, operations other than war (OOTW) kind of warfare is leader intensive. You will quickly get down to two officers in the TOC on 12-hour shifts. Train and empower your S-3 and S-2 NCOs, because if it works out like it did in Somalia, they will have a lot more responsibilities than they seem to have in CPXs and FTXs back home. Fortunately, I had some excellent NCOs and an enlisted soldier who had just come off the long relief exercise of Hurricane Andrew, where they had spent long hours operating a TOC. They knew *why* they were doing things; they were not just taking reports, posting maps, and keeping commun-ications, and it made all the difference. We would not have been nearly as successful without them and the skills they had learned.

Snipers. Snipers in this kind of war can be key, especially in the counter-sniper role. Do everything you can to get sniper training for as many of your people as possible in the line companies and scouts. And get more sniper weapons whenever you can. They are really valuable.

Split Tactical Command Post (TAC). Because of the dispersed nature of most of the operations we conducted, the battalion had to operate with a split TAC. There is just no way the commander and S-3 can effectively command and control an operation if they're side by side. Ideally, the commander should be with the dismounted TAC in the main effort, and the S-3 should be in

a vehicle in communication with the main TOC. (If you have a hard target and a definite scheme of maneuver—that is, if you're on a cordon and search—then the commander stays where he can talk to everyone and have the dismounted TAC ready to go in with the reserve element.) Usually we were out of range of the brigade TOC with everything but tactical satellite communications, so it was actually easier than most maneuvers in that respect. The key is to have a smart guy with his team in a place where he can always talk to everyone. Normally, that's the S-3. Your actual TOC may be tied to a specific location for various reasons, so train your TAC crews, and practice TAC operations frequently. (In our case, because we were responsible for HRS Marka, we moved the TOC only on major operations such as the battalion move to Kismayu in late February. For short-term operations we just went with the TAC vehicles and a mounted and dismounted TAC crew.)

Indirect Fires. Due to the nature of the war and the ROEs, there was not much use for indirect fire (mortars). Even when there is both a use for indirect fires and an ROE that supports it, I would argue against the commander bringing his actual fire support officer (FSO) along with him in the dismounted TAC. All you need there is someone who knows the fire plan and what targets to execute, and a good sergeant can do that. You need your FSO back in the fire support element coordinating fires and making sure there are no slip-ups in indirect coverage.

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TOW Company. Try to keep a mix of .50 caliber machineguns and MK 19s as secondary weapons in your TOW company. Having just MK 19s limits you. A .50 caliber can do all sorts of neat things, like eat through a building. Comes in handy. A 50-50 mix is about right. TOW night sights should be brought along in any case. They are excellent for night observation. Try to get vehicle spotlights for all TOW vehicles. They were good for deterrent patrolling against bandits.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) Commander. Get a senior, second-command captain to take your HHC. I know it's against branch policy and all that, but it really makes a big difference. For us, having a smart operator who knew the ropes and understood the big picture of supporting the battalion made all the difference. It's the old lesson of good guys in key places. Pick your captain, and then break all the stops to get him.

Communications. Push the envelope on your communications people. Make sure they know and practice all the directional antenna, field expedient OE-254, retransmission permutations possible. We were constantly operating at the very limit of our ranges. Before I went to Somalia, I frankly did not think it was possible to communicate with our organic assets over the distances that we did.

Liaison Officers. If you're working with another nation's force, make sure your liaison officers (LNOs) are capable of doing the job. You or your LNOs must explain your plan thoroughly. In some cases, handing the LNOs the graphics was not enough; occasionally, we would have to post the graphics onto their maps ourselves. I know it sounds silly, but you have to pay close attention to detail in coordinating these types of operations. Poorly coordinated multinational operations can cost a unit dearly once the shooting starts.

Civil Affairs. Trained civil affairs (CA) personnel are indispensable in this type of operation. In Somalia, brigade and battalion fire support elements were used for CA because of the lack of available indirect fire assets and the restrictions on the employment of the assets we did have. (In five months, all we fired from our mortars was illumination rounds.) In a more robust LIC environment, however, the FSO will have to be doing his own job of planning, coordinating, and directing indirect fires. Furthermore, none of the combat arms officers were trained in CA operations, and their initial efforts were clumsy. Units involved in humanitarian or LIC operations should have dedicated, trained CA personnel assigned to them. The lack of them in Somalia led us to more than one best-guess solution.

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The final overriding lesson I brought back from Somalia was the reaffirmation that you have to have good people. There were more than a few times—with the requirements coming thick and fast—when I thought we were at the limit of our ability to execute. In every instance, however, the company commanders, platoon leaders, and NCOs made it happen. The ability of the staff NCOs to run the TOC was absolutely critical to our success on more than one occasion. "Micromanagement" would not have worked. (A micromanager would have had to be MEDEVAC'ed after about a week.) Well-trained junior officers and NCOs who are capable of using their judgement—and who know that their chain of command trusts that judgement—bring success. You have to have good people to meet the challenges of operations other than war. Fortunately for our task force, we had them.

Lieutenant Colonel Martin N. Stanton was S-3, 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, during its operations in Somalia. He previously served in the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry, at Fort Lewis. He is a 1978 ROTC graduate of Florida Technological University.